

The Watershed Initiative *Frequently Asked Questions*

What is the Watershed Initiative?

- The Watershed Initiative is a new EPA program to encourage successful community-based approaches and techniques to protect and restore this nation's waters. Under this Initiative, EPA will conduct a national competition and award \$20 million in grants to about 20 selected watersheds to support promising efforts to improve watershed health.

What is the difference between the Agency's Watershed Initiative and its Water Quality Cooperative Agreements (WQCA)?

- The Watershed Initiative will be a much broader program than WQCA. Watershed Initiative grants will be awarded to state, municipal, local, community or non-profit groups with the goal of advancing the successes of watershed coalitions by encouraging innovative approaches for attaining water quality standards and improving water resources from both point and non-point sources. The Agency's WQCA are generally awarded to address point source water concerns.

I heard that EPA does not have the funding yet for the Initiative. What is the chance that the Initiative will not get funded?

- While appropriations for the fiscal year 2003 budget are being considered on Capitol Hill, EPA is optimistic that Congress will approve the President's request to fund this Initiative. The Senate appropriations committee has approved the appropriation as written and the House appropriations committee has yet to act on the measure. Since its announcement last January, EPA has received many favorable and often enthusiastic responses from the public which we hope will help provide the impetus for Congressional approval.¹

If funded, how much money would be available?

- A total of \$21 million has been requested. If approved, the majority of the funds will be made available in the form of grants to support up to 20 watershed-specific projects. Typical project awards will range from \$300,000 to \$1,300,000. Five percent of the total appropriation will go toward enhancing national tools, training, and technical assistance that will help local partnerships be more effective at improving watershed health.

¹ As of September 20, 2002

Is this a one-year program or will it be continued beyond FY '03?

- If the program is successful in achieving its goals, the Agency plans on requesting continued funding for additional watershed projects in future years.

Once a watershed is selected, will it continue to get funding in years to come?

- Grants awarded will be one-time awards, and grant recipients should use the funds within 2-3 years. Additional funding for the same watershed would require the recipient to recompute in subsequent years. In addition, a proposal for work beyond the initial funding period will not receive preferential consideration based on the applicant's previous award.

How do I know if I qualify?

- Under EPA's current authority, anyone (group or individual) that is not a part of a commercial enterprise is eligible to receive a Watershed Initiative grant. Businesses and for-profit entities, however, may be, and are strongly encouraged to be, active partners in the watershed effort.

Eligible projects can include any type of demonstration project related to the cause, effect, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of water pollution. For instance, projects that incorporate new technologies, methods and approaches to improving water quality would qualify. Projects that can serve as models for other communities are another example. In general, a project that can be considered "tried and true" is not eligible under this current authority.

Is there a match requirement?

- Yes, a minimum non-federal match of 25% of the total cost of the project is required. The match may be in the form of cash or in-kind services. Monies from other federal sources, unless specific by law, may not count toward the match.

Will a higher match get higher points?

- Yes, nominations that exceed the 25% minimum will receive a bonus of 5 extra points in the scoring process. However, it's an all-or-nothing situation--a nomination that contains a 30% match and one that contains a 100% match will both receive 5 points.

What type of projects is EPA looking for?

- EPA is looking for projects that are ready-to-go and have a wide array of public support. Projects must be able to show measurable environmental results in a relatively short time frame of 3-5 years. The four criteria EPA will be using to evaluate the nominations are:

1. Focus on results (20 points). Successful candidates must demonstrate an in-depth

knowledge of the watershed, present a sound approach for mitigating threats or impairments, and be likely to achieve measurable, objective environmental results in a relatively short time period.

2. Broad support (10 points). Project proposals that demonstrate and document strong and diverse stakeholder and community involvement will be favored.
3. Innovation (5 points). Because designated watersheds are expected to serve as models, projects that undertake unique, innovative, or novel approaches to environmental problem-solving will be scored higher. Proposals that address regulatory challenges or provide for market-based incentives are two examples.
4. Compatibility with other federal or state programs (5 points). Points will be awarded to those project proposals that integrate the common goals and complement the ongoing efforts occurring at the federal, state, or local level.

Who can submit a nomination?

- Watershed nominations must be submitted by either a Governor or a Tribal Leader.

Is there a limit on how many watersheds a Governor or Tribal Leader can nominate?

- Each Governor or Tribal Leader is invited to nominate two intra-state or intra-tribal watersheds.

There is no limit on the number of inter-state or joint state and tribal watersheds that can be nominated. For inter-state or joint state and tribal watershed projects, any of the supporting State Governors/Tribal Leaders may submit the nomination as long as they have the endorsement of all affected governmental entities.

How can I get my Governor (or Tribal Leader) to nominate me?

- Governors (or Tribal Leaders) may nominate up to two watersheds that are wholly within their state (or tribe). Consequently, EPA expects that competition for a Watershed Initiative grant will be intense. The Agency, therefore, encourages any watershed group that wishes to be nominated (and meets the specified criteria) notify its State Governor's or Water Quality Office as soon as possible to learn how their State will be selecting watersheds to nominate.

How will the nominations be made?

- EPA is leaving it up to the individual States and Tribes to determine the best process for selecting watersheds to nominate.

What if my watershed crosses into an adjoining state, do I need to be nominated by both Governors?

- Because this Initiative focuses on promoting broad partnerships, cooperative efforts that cross jurisdictional boundaries are encouraged. To provide an incentive, such projects

(also called “joint” projects) will not be counted toward each State’s (or tribe’s) limit of 2 nominations and will be given extra consideration in the scoring process.

The Agency realizes that obtaining one Governor’s (or Tribal Leader’s) nomination will be difficult enough and the burden of obtaining the nomination of another Governor will most likely be prohibitive. Therefore, for inter-state or joint state/tribal watersheds, only one Governor or Tribal Leader needs to submit the nomination. However, all joint nominations must have the endorsement of all affected state entities. Accompanying endorsements should come from the State Agency that is an active partner in the watershed effort, *e.g.*, active partners could include the State’s Water Quality Office, the Environment and Natural Resources Office, the Pesticide Office, the Office of Public Health or other applicable state agencies.

Would my interstate nomination score higher if nominated by each Governors rather than by one Governor?

- No, inter-jurisdictional nominations will receive “extra credit” in that they will be awarded a flat 5 extra points.

What if my watershed encompasses tribal or federal lands? Or even crosses over into another country?

- Multi-jurisdictional watershed proposals that cross inter-governmental boundaries will be treated in the same way as inter-state proposals. The affected tribes, federal agencies (*e.g.*, the U.S. Forest Service or Department of the Interior), or international governments (*i.e.*, Canada or Mexico) must be active partners in any watershed effort and official endorsements accompanying the Governor’s nomination are required.

What kind of materials do I need to submit to be nominated? Are there any forms required?

- Grant application forms are not required at this stage of the process. Only those watersheds that are selected will need to submit the proper forms (*e.g.*, Application for Federal Assistance, Standard Form 424 *et al*) sometime next March.

However, EPA requires that each nomination forwarded from a state or tribe contain a set of common elements. Each nomination package submitted to EPA must contain:

1. A one-page cover letter signed by the Governor or Tribal Leader.
2. A 10-page narrative that clearly outlines existing efforts and explains how the infusion of additional funds will result in cleaner water. This narrative must:
 - a) Characterize the watershed, identify the problem(s) and/or threat(s), and describe the overall watershed plan,
 - b) Describe the proposed projects,
 - c) Describe the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of project staff and stakeholder involvement,
 - d) Describe how the projects may serve as a model for other communities, and

- e) Outline community outreach effort, *i.e.*, how the public will be informed and involved.
3. Signed letter(s) from individuals or businesses committing to provide the required minimum non-Federal match of 25% of the total project budget.
4. Budgets reflecting a detailed breakdown of cost by category for each project.
5. Signed letter(s) from active partners indicating their commitment to implementing the watershed plan and specific proposed projects.
6. For inter-jurisdictional or joint nominations, signed letter(s) expressing the support of the other participating governmental entities.
7. Maps (optional).

How quickly do I have to assemble my materials? What is the submission deadline?

- Governors and Tribal leaders must submit their nominations to EPA no later than November 21, 2002. This means, however, that applicants must submit their materials to the State or Tribe earlier. Please contact your State's Governor's or Water Quality Office to ascertain when and where you should send your nomination materials.

What happens after Nov. 21? When will the final decision be made?

- The Agency has put together an ambitious schedule to review and evaluate the nominations. Once received, the nominations will be reviewed by Panels at the regional level and the national level. Each EPA Regional Administrator can forward 4 nominations from his/her region to the National Panel. These "semi-finalists" will then be evaluated and ranked by a National Panel and the Panel's recommendations will be forwarded to the Administrator for final selection.

EPA expects to announce selections in January 2003 and complete the grant award process, including grant negotiations through the appropriate Regional Office by May 2003. Projects should be underway by Summer 2003.